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PROVINCE OF SASKATCHEWAN

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THE HONOURABLE LYNDA HAVERSTOCK
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR OF SASKATCHEWAN

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Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly

It is my pleasure today to welcome you to the second session of the twenty-fourth Legislature of Saskatchewan.

Welcome to all of the people of our province, and to those beyond who are observing these proceedings, whether in this House or in their own homes.

It is also my pleasure to inform the Legislature that His Royal Highness, the Prince of Wales, will visit Saskatchewan from April 26th to April 28th.

It is appropriate to begin today by recognizing the Honourable Lorne Calvert as the new Premier of this province. And we extend thanks to former Premier Roy Romanow for his many years of dedicated leadership and service. His leadership and service has enabled our province to grow in strength and prosperity, and has extended beyond our borders benefiting our entire nation.

Ours is a province rich in natural beauty and filled with promise.

The late Edward McCourt, an esteemed writer and professor of English literature at the University of Saskatchewan, had this to say about our be'loved Saskatchewan:

"Everywhere there are things to be seen and felt that exalt or soothe the sensitive spirit: crocuses spreading a mauve mist along railway embankments before the last patch of snow has melted; wheatfields merging into a wave-surfaced green or golden ocean, unbounded save for an incredibly remote horizon rim at times indistinguishable from the sky itself."

"Nowhere," Professor McCourt wrote "is it possible for men and women to know better their littleness and greatness – that is, to know better themselves."

The people of Saskatchewan have always been tolerant, generous and hard working, and today we acknowledge our debt to those who have gone before us. The success that we enjoy rests on the dedication and courage of people who dreamed of creating a society where the future would be as limitless as the very skies themselves.

We must build on that success to connect to the future.

My government will listen closely to people, and is committed to being a partner with them in creating a prosperity that provides opportunities for all.

During this session, my government will connect to the future by focusing on the following priorities:

- A thriving economy;
- Healthy citizens, families and communities; and
- Responsive and effective government.

A THRIVING ECONOMY

The economy of our province is strong, and growing.

- There were 485,000 people working in Saskatchewan in the year 2000. This is an increase of approximately 5,000 over the previous record set in 1999.

- Saskatchewan exports abroad were $12.5 billion last year, a 28 per cent increase over the previous year.

- The year 2000 was a record year for potash producers in Saskatchewan with sales of over 14 million metric tonnes, an increase of 11 per cent over last year.

- A new record was set for drilling natural gas wells.
- Oil production reached a new high last year of approximately 151 million barrels.
- In the past three years, wild rice producers in northern Saskatchewan have grown over 80% of Canada's production.

We will achieve even greater success...

...in technology

The information highway provides our people and communities with opportunities to succeed in the new global economy.

My government will invest over $70 million over the next six years, to connect Saskatchewan communities, government offices, educational institutions and health facilities to high-speed Internet services.

...in research and development

The success of our economy is vitally dependent on research and development.

My government will continue to support research and development, building on previous investments including the Synchrotron, the Petroleum Technology Research Centre, and the Innovation and Science Fund.

...in community infrastructure

My government will support communities through the Canada-Saskatchewan Infrastructure Agreement, expending $170 million over five years and creating up to 6,000 seasonal jobs in our municipalities.

...in rural Saskatchewan

The strength of Saskatchewan's rural economy is crucial to our growth, sustainability, and lifestyle.

My government has created a new Office of Rural Revitalization to support economic development in rural Saskatchewan.

My government will increase expenditures on agricultural research and development.

Other measures will be introduced during this session to assist farmers, including:

- Programs designed to help farm families take advantage of new opportunities and to manage change in their present day operations; and
- The Saskatchewan Conservation Cover Program, which will provide direct payment to farmers converting marginal agricultural lands to a perennial cover.

Saskatchewan's rural landscape is changing dramatically due to rail line abandonment and elevator closures. We are working with communities and grass roots organizations throughout the province on options to retain branch lines, which if successful, will help preserve rural economies and help minimize road impacts.

...in transportation

Our roads and highways have been under extreme pressure for the last decade. The dramatic transfer of goods from rail to road, along with economic growth throughout the province, has created great challenges.

Due to our strong economy, my government can now better address highway renewal.

Spending on highways and roads will be at an all-time high in 2001.

This spending will mean substantial improvements to the highway system, including:

- An accelerated twinning program to complete the four-laning of Highway No.1 West by 2004.
- Rebuilding rural highways that form strategic corridors to move Saskatchewan grown and manufactured goods.
- Improving our primary and regional road system so that greater numbers of Saskatchewan's highways are capable of handling heavy traffic.

The Highways and Transportation Amendment Act will be introduced as part of a broader truck route management strategy.

...in northern Saskatchewan

My government will work with communities in northern Saskatchewan to connect them to the future.

New initiatives in forestry will create 10,000 jobs by the year 2005, and business opportunities will expand in this sector. For example:

- An integrated forestry development plan will allow northern communities to participate fully in resource management ownership, in contracting and in employment opportunities.

Increased geophysical survey work being undertaken in the North will encourage new mineral exploration, and increased exploration using new technologies will improve the potential for developing new mines in the North.

...in tax reform

Tax reform in our province has provided significant income tax cuts and attracted economic growth.

As of January 2, 2001 the Saskatchewan Flat Tax, the High Income Surtax and the Debt Reduction Surtax are gone.

Provincial income tax cuts in the years 2000 and 2001 will save Saskatchewan taxpayers nearly $317 million this year. By the end of 2003 the total impact of tax reform will result in savings of over $440 million per year, compared to 1999.

...in economic planning

More than ten thousand people have worked together to develop an economic blueprint for Saskatchewan. Their plan is set out in *Partnership for Prosperity*, a document my government intends to release early in this session.

Globalization and technology are changing the way in which we work. Much can be gained through collaboration and co-operation.

My government will, therefore, establish a labour-business roundtable providing a forum for complete and open dialogue between employees and employers. The intent is to reach consensus on a wide variety of labour issues to the benefit of all Saskatchewan workplaces.

In summary, the Saskatchewan economy is strong and it is growing. My government will make strategic investments in people and infrastructure connecting to a prosperous future.

HEALTHY CITIZENS, FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

It is our responsibility to ensure that every person in Saskatchewan can enjoy the fruits of our prosperity.

My government is working to help families and children, to support young people, to improve education and health care. It is working to keep our environment safe and wholesome. It is working to strengthen our unique Saskatchewan culture.

Helping Families and Children

My government is removing barriers that prevent too many people from sharing the benefits and meeting the obligations of full citizenship.

One of these barriers is poverty.

The Government of Saskatchewan took bold steps to reduce poverty and the effects of poverty among Saskatchewan families and children. The income security system has been redesigned. We began this work in 1997 and 1998 with the introduction of the *"Building Independence"* program. As a direct result of these initiatives:

- 3,800 fewer families, including 8,100 fewer children, rely on social assistance today.
- These programs, coupled with a strong provincial economy, have contributed to a record six consecutive years of declining social assistance caseloads.
- A *Report Card on Child Poverty*, produced by a national group called Campaign 2000, shows a decline in Saskatchewan's rate of child poverty for the second consecutive year. In the previous year's report card, Saskatchewan was the only province in Canada to register such a decline.

Children are our most precious resource, and we must continue to help in improving their lives.

My government will devote approximately $73 million over the next five years toward Early Childhood Development programs aimed at children in high-risk communities. An important emphasis will be to prevent Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, which begins to limit the development of children before they are even born.

My government will introduce amendments to *The Labour Standards Act* during this session, to increase maternity and parental leave provisions from the current level of 30 weeks to 50 weeks.

Improving Education

The key to success for our young people in the knowledge-based economy is good education and work training, and these are priorities for this government.

My government is:

- Connecting students to educational opportunities through modern technology.
- Renovating, expanding and building new schools in our K-to-12 and post-secondary systems.
- Increasing the number of Community Schools and extending this program to secondary schools.
- Providing additional schools in rural, urban and northern communities.
- Developing a Centennial Summer Student Employment Program. Over five years this program will result in summer jobs for 10,000 high school and post-secondary students who plan to return to school. This innovative program allows young people to contribute to the cost of their education, and to gain valuable work experience here at home. It is an example of the priority my government places on youth.

Connecting to Young People

Connecting to young people means connecting to the future, for they will shape our future in this new century.

As we prepare to celebrate our centenary in 2005, it is appropriate that we work side-by-side with the leaders of tomorrow.

It is for these reasons that my government has created a new Department of Culture, Youth and Recreation.

Young people are the future of this province, and they are already demonstrating leadership and service.

My government extends an invitation to the youth of our province to consider careers in public service. We need their ideas, talents and energy in a changing world where their familiarity with information technology will assist in transforming our efforts throughout government and in communities.

Connecting to Aboriginal peoples

Saskatchewan must be a prosperous, secure and tolerant society, where diversity is celebrated and seen as strength.

My government recognizes the increasingly important role that Aboriginal people will play in the social and economic future of our province. This government is committed to working with Métis and First Nations people to secure that future.

My government has recently appointed a Minister whose work will be dedicated entirely to Aboriginal Affairs.

My government has announced a Métis and Off-Reserve First Nations People Strategy.

My government is committed to increasing Aboriginal participation in management and professional positions in the public service. Through a new Aboriginal Internship and Management Development Program we will see significant improvements in the representative nature of our public service at all levels including management.

During this session, my government will introduce *The Métis Act*, acknowledging the valuable contributions of Métis people to Saskatchewan. This legislation will improve our ability to work collaboratively in addressing important issues.

Protecting our environment

My government recognizes the links between the quality of our environment, the strength of our economy and the health of our people.

During this session, legislation will be introduced to ensure that oil and gas wells and related sites are properly decommissioned and reclaimed.

My government will also undertake a comprehensive review of its major environmental protection legislation aimed at enabling more effective and flexible management and protection of the environment.

My government will invest in wind power as a safe, renewable energy resource and we will develop programs aimed at energy conservation.

Improving health care

This province introduced medicare and will continue to provide health care that is a model for the rest of Canada.

The issues we face are complex and they require innovative solutions. As our ability to prevent disease and to treat acute and chronic disease improves, the costs of delivering these services increases.

It is time to renew health care in this province and my government is committed to putting in place the measures to do it.

Last year, this government created a Commission on Medicare to work with Saskatchewan people in identifying pressing issues, and recommending action to ensure a system that is sustainable, stable, and effective. The Commission's report will be delivered within the next several weeks.

My government will give careful consideration to the report and its recommendations. We will listen to the feedback from communities and stakeholders and, we will then make the changes necessary to achieve a health care system that works well for the people of Saskatchewan.

This government will work to ensure that Saskatchewan's health care interests are placed on the national agenda.

During this session my government will also introduce *The Registered Nurses Amendment Act* to provide Advanced Clinical Nurses with the authority to perform the services that they have been trained to deliver.

Supporting a unique culture

Saskatchewan is rich in its cultural diversity. Our strength is found in our people and our communities.

My government knows that culture and recreation are central components of community life throughout Saskatchewan.

As well, the development of film and other cultural industries have become important generators of jobs and economic activities in our communities.

It is for these important reasons that my government has created a new Department of Culture, Youth and Recreation.

RESPONSIBLE AND EFFECTIVE GOVERNMENT

My government is dedicated to providing a responsible and effective administration. Our citizens expect and deserve no less.

The opportunities provided by our coalition government create a unique opportunity for connecting to the future. The co-management team provides new perspectives to decision making and forges a collective wisdom in developing public policy and governing our province.

My government will continue to:

- Be open, competent and accountable;
- Practice sound financial management;
- Provide quality public services that meet the needs of Saskatchewan people; and
- Provide leadership in a strong and united Canada.

In this, too, we will build on the foundation of our success in the past.

This government has carried out fundamental tax reform that will both put more money in the pockets of our citizens and create economic growth.

Sound fiscal management in this province has resulted in our receiving three financial upgrades in the past year alone.

During this session my government will propose amendments to the *Provincial Auditor Act*. These will strengthen the independence of the Provincial Auditor and enhance accountability through improved reporting.

CONCLUSION

Friends and neighbors, springtime in Saskatchewan is just around the corner.

Indeed, as Edward McCourt has written: "Everywhere there are things to be seen and felt that exalt or soothe the sensitive spirit."

Soon the warming sunshine will be upon us. Our dreams are as limitless as our far horizons.

We plan for a bright future for our children and ourselves. We hold that future in our hands, and it is there for us to make of it what we will.

We have in our province the vision, the ideas and the people to connect us to that future.

A vision of hope, prosperity, caring and sharing.

Let us connect to that future beginning today.

I leave you now to the business of the Session, with full confidence that the government will favorably discharge its duties and responsibilities.

May Divine Providence continue to bless our province and guide this Legislature in all its deliberations.